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# THE MCA ADVISORY

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The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America

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Volume 7 Number 1

January 2004

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**Editor:** John W. Adams, 60 State Street, 12<sup>th</sup> fl., Boston, MA 02109, [jadams@ahh.com](mailto:jadams@ahh.com)

Club website: [www.medalcollectors.org](http://www.medalcollectors.org)

Annual dues - \$20.00

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## Our Calendar

1. 1/17/2004 – MCA Club Meeting at the New York International Show at 12:00 noon.
2. 5/14 & 5/15/2004 – COAC to be held at the new location of the American Numismatic Society in downtown New York. NOTE THE CHANGE.
3. 6/1/2004 – Kolbe/Stacks' auction of the John J. Ford, Jr. Library, Part I. Venue will be California.
4. 8/18-8/22/2004 – ANA Convention in Pittsburgh. Our meeting date has not yet been selected.

## Editorial

This issue, the first of the New Year, contains an encouraging variety of material. Donald Scarinci reports on a new application of the commemorative medal, the creativity of the application being amplified by the beauty of the artist's design. The redoubtable Dick Johnson gives us 24 reasons to collect medals. Perhaps one of our dealer

subscribers will choose to run this list as a general advertisement for their business. One way or another, Dick's list deserves broad dissemination.

The year 2004 will witness the beginning of the dispersal of John Ford's massive collection of medals. The Ford auctions will offer an excellent entry point for new collectors. We "old timers" will have an opportunity to share our knowledge and, in the spirit of Dick Johnson's 24 points, guide others into the hobby that has been so fulfilling to ourselves.

Since taking over this publication October last, we have received any number of encouraging comments but only sparse response to the Advisory's content. Please feel more free to agree/disagree/expand.

## Scarinci & Hollenbeck Issues 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Medal

The law firm of Scarinci & Hollenbeck, LLC has issued a commemorative medal to celebrate its



15<sup>th</sup> year in business. Award winning artist Alex Shagin designed the medal that features portraits of Donald Scarinci and Ken Hollenbeck on the obverse and a phoenix rising from law books surrounded by a swirl listing the firm's practice areas on the reverse. This piece is also the first of its kind to feature a website address on its obverse.

The insert accompanying the medal describes the piece as follows:

*"We are pleased to present you with a limited edition original work of art designed by award winning artist, Alex Shagin, to commemorate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Scarinci & Hollenbeck. The tradition of commemorating and representing individuals and events with a medal began around 1400. This is the first medal in that tradition to prominently display a web site address on its obverse.*

*Alex Shagin began his career as a sculptor-engraver for the Leningrad Mint before immigrating to the United States in 1979. He has been recognized as one of the great American medallic artists and received the 1995 J. Sanford Saltus award for excellence."*

This medal will be given to the 100 employees of Scarinci & Hollenbeck, with 13 silver examples given to partners of the firm. The remaining 200 bronze medals will go to clients and friends of the firm.

"We are very excited to be giving this medal and to our employees and clients and friends of the firm," says Senior Partner Donald Scarinci. "As an

avid collector of coins and medals for nearly 20 years, this experience has been a wonderful one for me. It is my hope that our decision to commemorate our 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary through the commission of this piece of fine artwork will demonstrate to the business community that a medal can be a very meaningful gift."

Scarinci & Hollenbeck ranks among the top thirty largest law firms in New Jersey. Its practice features the six areas listed on the reverse of the medal: labor law, business law, real estate and land use law, environmental law, litigation, and public law. More information can be obtained on the law firm's web site, [www.njlegalink.com](http://www.njlegalink.com).

Donald Scarinci has collected coins and medals for almost 20 years. He has contributed articles about medallic art to "The Medal" and the "Numismatist" and he is a member of the Board of Directors of the Medal Club of America. He is also a member of the American Numismatic Society, the American Numismatic Association, the British Art Medal Society, and AMSA. (Donald Scarinci)

### The Wisdom of Dick Johnson

#### **Two Dozen Reasons To Collect Medals (A primer for the first-time medal buyer)**

1. **Rarity beyond your fondest wishes!** Unlike coins, made by the millions, medals are often struck in minute quantities, sometimes only a dozen or so. Also, award medals with a recipient's name, are unique—one of a kind—specimens!







2. **Condition and grading of medals are better than you might expect.** Unlike coins, medals do not circulate. Six classes of condition based on wear are not necessary. Grading standards for medals is even different from coins: For coins you grade the wear and overlook the abrasions. For medals you grade the abrasions and overlook the wear (usually absent).
3. **Open your eyes—enjoy the beauty!** Recently examining coins requires higher and higher power microscopes. Medals, however, are viewed for their total image—the beauty of the entire medallic design. And you can do this with unaided normal vision!
4. **Investment.** Sure you can buy coins for investment; but you can also buy medals for the same reason, if you so desire. Medal prices do rise for the same reason: supply and demand. But the most important medal advice is—see next item:
5. **Buy what you like!** Personal choice is the major factor in choosing to purchase a medal.
6. **Stop visiting the bank so often.** For two reasons: You can spend less for medals—you get more for your money—and medals don't need to be placed in safe deposit boxes.
7. **Live with your medals.** Select several of your favorite medals to place them in a highly visible place—on a shelf, a mantle, in a curio cabinet. Both you and your friends can view and enjoy them.

Place the rest in a cabinet and rotate the ones for viewing.

8. **Become interested in people on medals.** The most frequent device on medals is, not surprisingly, people! Hundreds of thousands of portraits appear on medals. Who is your idol, hero, or professional celebrity? You are apt to find their portrait on a medal.
9. **Build a balanced collection.** Seek medals of different periods and artists, not just those that are current. You will enjoy the variety of styles, designs, patinas, and finishes—in addition to the topical interests.
10. **Liquidity?** Yes, indeed. Your medal collection can be sold nearly as quickly as any other collection. There may not be a medal dealer in your city, but there are ample specialized dealers in medallic art.
11. **Fakes and copies.** The do exist, just as in coins. But medals are not as devious. Copies of coins are made by crooks. Copies of medals are made by museums for serious numismatists to study.
12. **For the history buff in all of us.** Medals are a supreme source of history and symbology. Medals are unrivaled if you like the thrill of uncovering their history, their special stories. Research to your heart's content.
13. **Bargains abound!** You can purchase medals from many sources. Often the sellers are unaware of their value to collectors. There is no price guide. Sellers set their own prices, oftentimes at prices very much undervalued as a collectible. Do



not overlook these sources:  
Internet auctions, flea markets,  
antique dealers in addition to the  
medal dealer members of MCA.

14. **Protected surface.** Unlike coins, most medals made in the last century have a patina, or a highlighted finish. After which they are given an unseen coating of lacquer to ward off nicks and wear.
15. **Pick a topic!** Since medals are issued for so many events and subjects, you can virtually pick any topic and build a medal collection around that. Pick as many topics that interest you; find how many medals you can acquire on those subjects.
16. **Free reign.** No holes to fill in an album. Build a medal collection at your own personal pace and direction. Define your specialties as you wish.
17. **Ideal collectible.** You could not ask for a better collectible. They are permanent metal, highly artistic (often by famous artists!), easy to acquire, easy to store and display. Ideal physical objects for a collection. Public museums and institutions have recognized this for ages.
18. **Meet some of the nicest people—other medal collectors.** Intelligent, knowledgeable, willing to share their common interests and experiences with others, medal collectors are some of the most congenial numismatists in the field.
19. **And great medal dealers!** The handful of medal dealers are great people. Before I retired as a medal

dealer to write about medals, my former competitor is now one of my best friends.

20. **Medals require a minimal amount of care.** You don't have to feed 'em, but you do have to take care of them. Medals don't ask for a lot of attention, however, and can best be stored in trays or cases.
21. **Forget slabbing.** You can still touch medals! Except for proof surface medals you can handle 'em. Feel their relief. They are unfazed by finger oils (unlike coins). Thrill to their tactile feel!
22. **Leave your mark in numismatics.** Of all the numismatic literature, medals are the least covered. Tremendous opportunities exist for forming a topical medal collection and writing a catalog based on your collection, even creating the standardized work. This will benefit other collectors and place your name in permanent numismatic history.
23. **Well respected.** You don't have to brag. But as a collector of medals others in the field will automatically know of your advanced numismatic knowledge, collecting taste and skills.
24. **For sheer enjoyment!** Having been a collector for sixty years and involved with medals since 1962, I have collected just about everything within numismatics. I can say, without fear of contradiction, nothing has given me more sheer enjoyment than collecting medals! That will be true for you too.



## A Medal Mystery (by John Adams)

In his classic work on historical medals, C.W. Betts did not make many mistakes. One such occurs on his number 12, a medal depicting Philip II on the obverse and, on the reverse, an allegory wherein the New World presents its riches to Spain. Betts dates this medal to 1581 based on the motto on the reverse: RELIQVVM DATVRA at the top and INDIA in the exergue. Betts translates this motto "India about to give the remainder" which seemed highly appropriate for the year in which Spain had taken over Portugal's New World possessions. Van Loon had made the same mistake, writing almost two centuries earlier.

In *Italian Medals in British Public Collections* (published this past year), Philip Attwood marks the date as 1560. Mr. Attwood's conclusion is solidly based on contemporary correspondence written by the engraver of the medal Gianpaolo Poggini. Indeed, the master supplies many useful insights on the origin of the design, friends to whom he sent examples and the like.

We have assembled data on a sampling of Betts 12's as follows:

<u>Collection</u>	<u>Metal</u>	<u>Diameter</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>Manuf.</u>	<u>Signed</u>
Private U.S.	AR	39.1	24.25	Cast & Chased	No
Private U.S.	AR	37.4	18.36	Cast & Chased	No
British Museum	AE	39	23.09	Cast	Yes
British Museum	AR	39	16.23	Cast & Chased	No
British Museum	AR	38	19.44	Cast	No
Ashmolean	AE	38	16.78	Cast	No
Private U.S. Stack's Sale	AE,gilt	40.6		Cast	Yes
1/20-21/04	AE	38.3	17.02	Struck	No

In *The Currency of Fame* (p. 168), Philip Attwood writes: "The medal is known in two versions. One is signed below the bust. The other...was produced from the same dies after extensive reworking, possibly by a Nederlandish artist." The wide variation in diameters—37.4 to 40.6 millimeters—suggests to us that a multiplicity of distinctly different dies was employed. This conclusion is buttressed by a close comparison of the details on examples #1, #2, #7 and a piece described below, all of which are distinctly different. Whatever the process employed by the artisan(s) who created these pieces, that process did not result in long production runs. The careful chasing of several of the medals also bespeaks an art form wherein handcrafting for special occasions was the order of the day.

Mr. Attwood's suggestion that unsigned medals may have been made by a hand(s) other than Poggini's is open to question. This is a possibility, certainly, but it is also true that Poggini didn't sign every medal that he made. Whereas some of the seven examples noted above are distinctly different, they are nonetheless sufficient similar to argue for a common source.

In the sale held by A.H. Baldwin in October of this year, a most curious piece is described (see lot 2441). The familiar RELIQVVM DATVRA reverse is mated with an obverse found nowhere else to our knowledge. This obverse features a cherub holding the scales of Justice flying over the skyline of a city that borders water, either a river or the ocean. The motto NICA NILA translates "Nothing will conquer us." The medal is

truly hand-crafted: the silver (cast) planchet is gilt carefully chased and then banded to support a filigreed decoration around the rim that is almost identical to a medal pictured in COAC 1987 (p. 68). This latter medal is dated 1577.

On the fair assumption that the medal was made circa 1560-1580, a list of likely events that the obverse might commemorate includes the peace of Cateau-Cambresis (1559), the annexation of Portugal (1580) and the treaty of Orville (1585). We are more inclined to conclude that the medal was custom made to celebrate an occasion of personal importance to King Philip, who was Poggini's sponsor for the period in question. We invite readers' comments on this elegant mystery; someone must know something that would shed light.